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Cities as Built and Lived Environments: Scholarship from Muslim Contexts, 1875 to 2011

Aptin Khanbaghi
Editor

Cities as Built and Lived Environments

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Scholarship from Muslim Contexts, 1875 to 2011

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Aptin Khanbaghi

Islam

Between Message and History

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إن هذا المجلد حسب مقسم اللغة إلى الإنجليزية و التركية و العربية

Abstracts in English

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Aptin Khanbaghi
London, December 2013

Introduction

Today, according to *Bloomberg Businessweek*, more than fifty per cent of the world's population dwells in urban areas.[1] Although urbanism is generally associated with modernity, since the foundation of Islam at the end of antiquity in West Asia, cities have been an integral part of Muslim civilisations. A significant number of today's Muslim majority cities are located in the region known as the cradle of Urban Civilisation.[2] Mada'in, one of the largest metropolises of the world in late antiquity, became part of the emerging Muslim empire in the seventh century. It had been the capital of the Persian Empire and the most important centre of Christian and Jewish leadership in Asia. The geopolitical and economic significance of this region, which saw the emergence of ancient cities like Babylon and Seleucia, prompted the Abbasids to found the city of Baghdad in 762 ad near Mada'in.[3]
Islam itself was born in a city renamed by its Prophet simply al-Madina, "the town", and thus was viewed by the growing Muslim population as the city par excellence.[4] Even beyond Arabia, the Muslim urban experience has been based on cities of historical importance. The heartland of the Greek empire,[5] Constantinople,

also known as the city par excellence or *Polis* by the Greeks, has been a major city in the Muslim world since the fifteenth century. Thus, the rising Muslim civilisation absorbed the sophisticated and cosmopolitan cities of Egypt, Mesopotamia or Greece after the seventh century.

Evidently, the Muslim world has had a glorious past enabling it to encompass unique cities belonging to great civilisations; the present, however, has revealed itself to be more challenging. The demographic explosion and subsequent challenge of spatial management in today's world has generated new concerns in Muslim majority countries. High birth rates, migrations, housing developments, increase in traffic, fuel consumption, pollution, neglect of old buildings and elimination of green spaces weigh dramatically on the expanding urban centres of Muslim societies. In addition to global issues affecting many cities in the world, cities in Muslim majority regions have been experiencing incessant conflicts and political turmoil, leading to large material and intellectual loss, particularly in the last four decades.

Looking towards an Objective Study

As the recent coverage by the media has shown, cities in Muslim contexts have reached a major historical crossroads.[6] Because cities in the Muslim majority countries have been affected by significant upheavals in the last four decades, the study of urban societies in Muslim contexts is at present more opportune than ever. Muslim majority countries, however, have not all been affected in the same way. Their past and their geographical location have played an important role in their present religious, social and political make-up. The Muslim Civilisations Abstracts project endeavours to address these points in a new volume which provides insight into the history, diversity, challenges and dynamism of cities in Muslim contexts.

Most studies on cities are focused on urban centres in Europe and North America, since they

rank highly in the business world. Cities in the developing world, which include most Muslim majority urban centres, have not been of interest until very recently. Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Kuala Lumpur and Istanbul have only made news among investors in the past fifteen years. The spotlight today is very much on global cities, and very few cities in the Muslim world make it to the top of the list.[7] As a result, the theories which were developed during the twentieth century in urban studies cannot necessarily be applied to Muslim majority cities.[8] Moreover, the cities in

the Muslim world are very different from one another across the board. They are spread across three continents, with huge geopolitical differences and wealth disparities. In particular, poorer areas in the Muslim world have received less attention from foreign scholars, and the work produced by local scholars has generally gone unnoticed elsewhere.

Countries with colonial pasts attract researchers from their former colonial metropolises; however, their tendency has been to consult exclusively North American or European publications.[9] As Kamran Asdar Ali rightly asserts, individuals' positions are based on their own experience and world view.[10] We need to encourage a broader and more inclusive analysis which would include perspectives of researchers based in both northern and southern hemispheres. In order to provide a balanced view, the MCA project has been given the mandate to transmit the works of African and Asian scholars who are based in the cities under study.

Spotlight on some Major Cities in Muslim Societies

Many Muslim majority countries have a tripartite past, divided into pre-Islamic, medieval Islamic and colonial periods. The medieval and colonial periods are reflected in the planning and structure of the cities, but are diluted within the new post-colonial dimension. Historically, much of the daily life in Western Asian and North African cities revolved around the main bazaar; the colonial phase, however, added new features, as the colonisers fashioned sections of the cities for their own use and needs. In Casablanca, the roads were laid out in a way that enabled French troops to circulate easily. Modern Algiers was specifically planned to host the colonists.[11] The old bazaars gradually lost their importance to new business districts and this decline continued in the post-colonial period.

In the case of Indonesia and Malaysia, urbanism was a legacy of the colonial period, and as late as the 1980s, these countries remained undeveloped. The local language had not even formulated a term for "city" in its European or Western Asian sense. The focal point of an inhabited zone was a port or a fort.[12] The concept of city was not transferred by the Muslims to the Archipelago, but by Europeans in the seventeenth century. As such, the study of cities in Indonesia and Malaysia would provide a different dimension to the field of urban studies in Muslim majority nations and elsewhere.

Vast changes occurred in major cities of Muslim majority countries after the fall of the

Ottoman Empire but accelerated further in the 1940s and 1950s. Many historical cities such as Istanbul, Alexandria and Izmir lost much of their cosmopolitan social fabric due to supranationalist ideologies and to foreign interference in local affairs.[13] Other famous cities such as Baghdad and Damascus, which in their glory days were the heartlands of Muslim empires and until very recently were important centres of art and culture, have turned into disaster zones. Most of these cities have lost their world class position to recently developed global cities such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Istanbul stands out, not only because of its citizens' aspirations to be a major international urban centre, but also due to international expectations, since it is an ancient historical city at the gate of Europe.

Radical Transformation and Enduring Memories

Despite many ups and downs, Istanbul has survived over a millennium without declining into a marginal city. Although it has shifted from Christianity to Islam, the memories of its multiconfessional past have been engraved in its architecture and documented in books published about Istanbul. It is only in the past sixty years

that Istanbul has lost its old cosmopolitan character. The quarters which belonged to Greek or Armenian communities have left their religious and cultural stamp on the city. Following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the Turkification policies that ensued, most of the non-Muslim population left. Their neighbourhoods, however, were not taken over by the remaining city dwellers, but by new migrants coming from Anatolia. The original Istanbulites claim a European identity for their city and present themselves as cosmopolitan. They have developed a certain nostalgia for the past and ignore the rural migrants who compose most of Istanbul's twelve million residents.[14] By clinging to an old image of Istanbul, they wish to portray their city as one belonging to a cultural and economic elite. This nostalgia is best reflected in the Beyoğlu quarter of Istanbul, where a new synthetic identity is being constructed.[15]

Istanbul is not the only city whose native residents lament its new composition. Karachi is another example; due, however, to the present political instability in Pakistan and the weak presence of Karachi in world history, the ethnographical and anthropological aspects of this metropolis have been less investigated. Istanbul's reputation surpassed most of the cities of the world, due to its old multinational and

multi-confessional make-up, whereas Karachi appeared much later on the itinerary of world travellers and merchants, and became a multiconfessional town after the eighteenth century up to the Partition of India. Despite the outflow of Greek, Armenian and Jewish minorities from Istanbul, the present stability of the city and its geopolitical affinity with Europe has made it a more attractive place to foreigners. Karachi faces sectarian violence and poor investment in its infrastructure.[16] Nonetheless, the flood of migration to Karachi did not stop after Partition. Even after the arrival of Muslim migrants from India, people continued to migrate to Karachi, not only from other Pakistani provinces, but also from poorer countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar.[17]

The population metamorphoses which took place in Istanbul and Karachi were initially caused by dramatic historical events, generating both massive emigration and immigration. Cities such as Algiers or Tangiers lost more migrants from their colonial populations who did not want to live under indigenous rule, and their departure prompted the arrival of indigenous people from the nearby provinces.[18] In the past four decades, all major urban centres in the Muslim world have experienced an influx of migrants from smaller urban centres and rural areas. Tehran, Jakarta and Cairo, like Istanbul, Karachi and Algiers, have been under tremendous pressure to accommodate the new residents.

Persistent Challenges: The Social Divide between Rich and Poor

Large waves of migrants are a burden on the infrastructure of these cities. The number of rural migrants arriving in Jakarta was so overwhelming that in 1970 it was proclaimed a "closed city", due to laws forbidding new migrants from settling in the urban agglomeration.[19] Despite this, many settled in fringe areas and turned out to be more successful than local residents in finding jobs.[20] However, the sheer number of people overcrowded the metropolitan zones.

Since there is no official border preventing migrants from entering these cities, planning becomes a key factor. Constructions, industries and traffic management have to be considered carefully. The civic leaders in these regions face issues which are very different from those in developed countries where the population is shrinking. In many Muslim majority countries the urban culture is very dynamic.[21] The urban spaces in such metropolises should ideally be regenerated at a much faster pace than in European cities. The population grows in Cairo,

Karachi and Tehran at a rate unknown in Europe since the oil crisis of 1973.

Previous studies focusing mainly on European societies have concluded that industrialisation and urbanisation have been the main causes of drops in fertility rates.[22] However, this pattern has not been paralleled in the Muslim world. In France and England, low-income families are integrated within the cities through provision of subsidised housing. In developing countries, the less fortunate have to fend for themselves and

build their own homes in shanty towns. These informal settlements mushroom around megalopolises. In Cairo, migrants from villages and young low-income urban people end up in such locations. Based on theories developed from studies on urban centres in Europe, the fertility rate should be lower in Cairo than in rural areas in Egypt. This is not the case, however, as the rate seems to be identical in both zones.

Therefore, the difference between European and North African cities has to be taken into consideration, and different research tools have to be used when investigating Arab cities in general. Research produced by institutions based in Arab cities could play an important role in this respect as they are located in the areas which are being studied. Their participation can advance the field of urban studies and generate new theories applicable to cities in developing countries. Thus, for example, case studies about Cairo, such as the one comparing the fertility rates of migrants and original residents, can be used as a model for studying similar groups in Karachi or Tehran.[23]

Another noticeable issue, when studying cities in Muslim majority countries, is the expansion rates of different neighbourhoods. The poorer areas are not the only ones with a growing population. Shanty towns expand horizontally, but the wealthier zones of the megalopolises are transformed vertically, with high rises appearing everywhere. Due to a lack of open space, wealthy neighbourhoods in Tehran and Istanbul, where spacious homes and orchards had once prevailed, have been transformed into modern highrise blocks with paved car parks. Since space is at a premium and maintenance of land expensive, environmental concerns are not a priority.[24]

The emulation of modern North American cities has affected not only the dwellings but also the marketplaces, with traditional bazaars being replaced by modern shopping complexes.[25]

Urban Planning

More research is needed to address urban planning when dealing with cities in the Muslim

world, as the disorder generated by industrialisation and overpopulation has impacted significantly on the lives of citizens. Some of the major cities of the Muslim world face grave environmental issues. Tehran made the news in January 2013 due to the high levels of pollution which paralysed the city.[26] During the years of war with Iraq (1980–8), Tehran's population more than doubled and the municipality failed to invest in the capital's infrastructure. The declining of resources and the government's restricted budget prompted the post-war mayor of Tehran, Gholamhossein Karbaschi, to increase taxes and reduce free services. He introduced congestion charges and aimed to develop the poor neighbourhoods in the south of the city and build department stores.[27] Historically, due to the harshness of the weather in Iran, Iranians were very attentive to the structuring of their cities, in order to deal with climate management and water supply (through *kariz* or *qanat*, i.e. subterranean built watercourses).[28] The population growth of the last three decades seems, however, to have let things get out of hand, as Tehran has increasingly had to deal with problems of water supply. The city is now in great need of an urban regeneration strategy which can respond to its ever increasing population.

Despite the visible challenges experienced by the major megalopolises in the Muslim world, there has been visionary planning in the past to improve the infrastructure of major urban centres. Already in the mid-twentieth century there were reports and plans for easing congestion in Istanbul, Cairo and Tehran, which ultimately led to the building of modern underground systems in the 1980s and 1990s. However, the demographic explosion in these cities has been of such a magnitude that even the underground networks and congestion charges have not been sufficient to ease the transport problems.

Ethnic Divide

Recent studies of the most populated countries of the Muslim world, such as Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey, have addressed the issues around infrastructure and population growth, despite the risk of triggering political and sometimes religious reactions. Many of the major cities of the Muslim world have

been affected by ethnic divisions. In the case of Tehran, however, the ethnic differences have not generated any bitterness or confrontation. The city is predominantly Persian speaking, while its economic heartland, the bazaar, is dominated by the Turkic-speaking Azeris. The major division

is socio-economical. By contrast, the divisions in Istanbul and Karachi each have historical roots stemming from a bitter war that created their modern nations. Although Istanbul is no longer suffering from war, Karachi has been plagued by ethnic and religious conflicts: on some occasions pitting the original Sindhi population against the migrants, and on other occasions involving militant and sectarian groups aiming to impose their political and religious views on the inhabitants.[29] While in Karachi the appropriation of space goes beyond the physical sense and has acquired even a political sense (involving opposing factions), in Istanbul it has an exclusively theoretical sense. In theory, Istanbul, according to the republican directives of a nationalist modern Turkey, was not intended to be a multicultural city. The Turkish state was built for the Turkic people of Anatolia, while Istanbul, as an integral part of Turkey, did not correspond to this ideal, upon the creation of the Turkish state in 1923–4. Its non-Muslim population was prompted to leave and, in turn, masses of Muslims migrated to Istanbul from the Asian provinces. Nonetheless, Istanbul did not turn into a homogenous city with no ethnic divide. The new wave of migrations created socio-spatial exclusion, as the Kurds who arrived in Istanbul became outsiders due to their poor economic status and their ethnic background.[30]

By chance, current events in Istanbul have revived the ghosts of the past, due to the recent intentions of the ruling Justice and Development Party to take away Taksim Square from the public. Protestors evoked the Armenian cemetery, which was expropriated by the Republicans seven decades earlier to build a park, hoping to grab international attention by making analogies between themselves and the Armenians, who were sacrificed for political agendas in the first half of the twentieth century.[31] Taksim in Istanbul, like Tahrir Square in Cairo, has become a symbol of a nation's discontentment with its political establishment. The physical and vocal presence of the masses in these squares demonstrates the importance of public spaces in the major historical cities of Muslim majority countries. The media coverage of these massive political gatherings is bound to lead to new debates on "public space in Muslim contexts" in both the local and foreign literature.

Effects of War

Istanbul and Karachi are both cities which have suffered from the effects of conflicts that opposed ethnic and religious communities. These tragedies occurred after wars which split the Ottoman

Empire and the Indian subcontinent into smaller independent states in the first half of the twentieth century. Beirut and Baghdad are more recent victims of foreign invasions and civil war opposing groups of different confessions.

After more than a decade of conflict, Beirut remains a city divided along lines of religion and wealth, the Shiite southern suburbs being less prosperous.[32] The Shiite community consolidated its position in Beirut in the 1990s, and thereafter planned a zone which registered the religious values of the Shiite community. In southern Beirut, for example, single-sex beaches have been established to accommodate pious Shiite women wishing to use *shar'i* beaches.[33] There have been efforts, since Rafiq Hariri's liberal policies, to improve the infrastructure of south Beirut, and high-end apartments have been built.[34] Baghdad was affected by the atrocities of war later than Beirut, and continues to be plagued by sectarianism. The city is a shadow of its past glory, when it attracted poets and learned men under the reigns of the caliphs. Baghdad today has all the amenities of a modern city such as mobile phones, the Internet and satellite dishes. New shopping centres have been built, and a nightclub scene has re-emerged. Nonetheless, the city lacks security and people's lives are in danger.[35] Due to the lack of security, researchers seem to have shied away from conducting studies in Baghdad, where any cultural activity has become a challenge.[36]

In the last few decades, many other historic cities have been damaged by the effects of war in

Muslim majority countries such as Afghanistan and Syria. The effects of war have not only damaged buildings and monuments but also harmed the intangible heritage of these countries. A series of books catalogued in this volume cover the oral and written traditions of cities such as Damascus, Aleppo and Herat. With the endless war in Afghanistan and the recent conflict in Syria, the subjects covered in these books are more valuable than ever as they reflect a local perception of a culture which might no longer be accessible.

Heritage and Preservation

Megalopolises part with their past both by losing their original inhabitants and by falling prey to investments for urban renewal. The economic modernisation of urban centres is sometimes a bigger threat to cities, as mentioned earlier. Historic districts in Tehran have generally not been well preserved. Moreover, urban renewal in the case of Tehran has not meant a gentrification

of a neighbourhood but rather the replacement of villas by high rises. Since Tehran does not have a historically important heritage district, in order to evaluate Iranian conservation efforts we need to look at Isfahan. The monuments of the city are evidently suffering from damage, despite being registered by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.[37] According to new studies conducted by Iranians themselves, there have been initiatives to tackle the problems caused by pollution, traffic and transport development and the government has been asked to develop preservation strategies. Cultural heritage officials recommended that construction in sensitive areas of Isfahan be strictly regulated and these zones closed to traffic.[38] Nevertheless the UNESCO warnings were taken lightly and new developments have appeared near the heritage sites, which, combined with worsening traffic conditions and the construction of a subway under a historic avenue, have impacted further on Isfahan's monuments. Insufficient planning, combined with environmental changes, has even led to the drying up of Isfahan's main river.[39]

In general, the preservation of historical districts in Third World countries is a monumental task, as, due to financial constraints, officials focus less on heritage zones and more on mundane issues such as the salaries of municipal employees.[40] Jakarta is a case in point. Its Batavia neighbourhood was built by the Dutch in the seventeenth century. The collection of villages which formed Jakarta in the 1960s grew into a city of over five million people in the 1970s, changing the face of the city. The old buildings were used for administrative purposes, and open spaces were not cared for. As in the case of Isfahan, there were plans to construct roads running through heritage zones, and the new infrastructure would have caused damage to the remaining historic sites, had the government pursued such plans.[41] In 1970, Jakarta's governor initiated a project to restore its historic centre. The project lasted four years at a cost of four million dollars, and served to preserve only a few buildings. Ultimately, the restoration project was not successful since the desired results were not obtained, partly due to lack of funds.[42]

The post-Soviet urban centres of Central Asia have only recently attracted the attention of scholars in the West. The cities in this region can be divided into two categories: historical cities, such as Merv, Bukhara and Samarqand, which had been politically undermined during the Soviet era; and cities like Tashkent and Dushanbe, which were of less historical value and which the

Soviets chose as regional administrative centres. For the historic cities there is a great deal of earlier documentation available; however, unlike for most other Muslim countries, there is not much recent indigenous multi-disciplinary research on hand. Local researchers are not interested in the modern infrastructure issues or the demographic crisis, and have been focusing rather on the historical setting and archaeological discoveries in Central Asian cities. Unsurprisingly, Central Asia experienced an important upheaval after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet urban planning came abruptly to an end and left the population disoriented. While in the Soviet era housing was a right,[43] this was no longer the case after the creation of the independent Central Asian states. The region faced urbanisation challenges linked to high birth rates and rural migration, which were mostly addressed

in international reports rather than by local governments and scholars.[44] The lack of strategy for urban development has discouraged comprehensive research, which explains the scarcity of publications on matters related to infrastructure, anthropology and ethnography.

Encouraging Future Research

There are certainly more topics and regions to be covered; nevertheless, through this volume the MCA project has achieved its mission, by demonstrating once again the diversity of Muslim societies. The theme of "cities" is one of the most tangible subjects, which can be explored even by lay people through travelling. Unfortunately, due to the recent turmoil in many of the Muslim majority countries, a number of historical cities are now difficult to access. We rely more today on the media to learn about these regions. The recent media images from Istanbul and Cairo do not capture the entire reality, however, and therefore it is important to find other sources of information and consult local academic and nonacademic interpretations in order to complement the discussions taking place in Western Europe and North America. The present volume has gathered together over two hundred abstracts of publications produced in the Muslim majority countries with a view to supporting such debates. The absence of abstracts from some regions should not be regarded as an oversight, but rather seen as a challenge to reach out to scholars in those corners of the world. Moreover, the concerns of authors differ from one region to another and this is echoed in the publications gathered here: there are particular subjects regarding cities which are not covered for certain

countries presented here. Thus, an overview of the abstracts collected in this volume will enable local and international scholars, as well as governmental agencies, to detect gaps in research on specific urban subjects.

In conclusion, "cities" is a topic through which the diversity of humanity can be visually perceived, for cities are dynamic expressions of human civilisation. They evolve with their occupants and undergo change according to the inspirations and ideas of the latter. They experience cultural shifts prompted by new trends, new governors, invaders or mass movements. These changes have been more drastic in recent decades in Muslim societies, due to political instability and uncontrollable demographic explosion. It is to be hoped that the present volume will facilitate and encourage further balanced research on cities in Muslim contexts.

Notes

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ABSTRACT

Kotagede

Sightseers have been attracted to four famous locations linked to the Islamic Mataram kingdom, namely Kraton Yogyakarta, Taman Air Tamansari, Makam Raja-raja in Imogiri, and the ancient city of Kotagede. This book focuses on Kotagede using both historical and anthropological approaches. The information provided here could be useful to those who want to study the Muslim cities and their relation with Muslim civilisations.

Kotagede was the capital of the Islamic Mataram kingdom of which a brief history is first given. The author relies heavily on *Babad*, *Serat* and oral tradition as his historical sources. *Babad* and *Serat* are chronicles which were written by men of letters, and therefore are not reliable historical sources, since they contain elements of literary fantasy. No other primary sources have been consulted.

Kotagede is near Yogyakarta. As an important ancient city, it has many sacred buildings still extant today. In Kotagede, the burial complexes, which are very important to Javanese, have been preserved as they are believed to have mystical forces. There are pictures of graves provided in many forms along with their symbols.

The author has dedicated an important section to handcraft in Kotagede. He mentions that Kotagede is famous for its handcraft which made the city a trade centre in the past. Its silver craft is coveted still both in Indonesia and abroad.

This book stands out when compared to two other books on the city, *Kotagede: Life between Walls* written by Bambang Tri Atmojo and *Perancangan Buku Tentang Kerajinan Perak Kotagede* (*An Illustrative Book on Kotagede's Silver Industry*) written by Erika Yuanita, as it provides both the history of the silver trade and its development in the region.

Imron Rosidi

The Social Process of Adaptation in Urban Settlements of Yogyakarta

Perkampungan di Perkotaan Sebagai Wujud Proses Adaptasi Sosial Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta

Yogyakarta is known as the centre of Javanese civilisation. Although the majority of its population is Muslim, the indigenous Javanese culture still permeates the area's customs and traditions. This book focuses on the distinctive sociological features of Yogyakarta which stem from the incorporation of villages into the city. The book analyses the process of adaptation of two villages to urban Yogyakarta.

The readers are invited to learn about the "other side" of urban civilisation. The amalgamation of separate settlements is basically viewed as an effort to build a city. However, the

book has paid less attention to the abandonment of previously inhabited areas.

Methodologically, this book is very technical. The descriptions are quantitative rather than qualitative. The explanations are mostly based on statistical data and do not always take into consideration common observations.

The detailed explanation and pictures provided make the book particularly useful for policy makers. There are sections which might be of interest to a non-specialised audience, such as a section on gossip in Yogyakarta.

Imron Rosidi

Studies on the Growth and Decline of Port Cities: Cases of Barus and Sibolga

Studi Pertumbuhan dan Pemudaran Kota Pelabuhan: Kasus Barus dan Si Bolga

The arrival of Islam to Indonesia is very much linked to the history of the port cities in Nusantara archipelago. In the seventeenth century Barus city played an important role as a port city and hub for international traders, especially Muslims. However, today Barus has been eclipsed by Sibolga, which has outgrown the old port.

The study seeks to find out the causes of the respective decline and growth of these two cities. According to the book, politics and the economy were dominant factors behind the decline of Barus and the growth of Sibolga. The book is

unique in providing accurate geological and geographical pictures of the two cities.

This research is very useful to policy makers who need to anticipate the possible decline of port cities and gear their efforts towards improving them. Those interested in comparative studies of different cities and ports would also benefit

from this work.
In terms of methodology, the book is weak because it does not use in-depth observation. The subject of the book is socio-historical; however, unfortunately the book does not use many historical sources. Another weakness is the absence of an academic reference system, such as the use of footnotes.
Imron Rosidi

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